



LINCOLN CHAFEE

U.S. SENATOR

RHODE ISLAND

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, February 15, 2006

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CHAFEE QUESTIONS CHERTOFF IN HEARING ON RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, **U.S. Senator Lincoln Chafee (R-RI)** participated in a hearing in which **The Honorable Michael Chertoff**, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) testified before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, of which Chafee is a member.

Today's hearing marked the twentieth hearing held by the committee to uncover the problems with preparedness and response to the disaster in the Gulf Coast. On the one-year anniversary of Michael Chertoff's swearing in as Secretary of DHS, he faced a host of questions from both Democrats and Republicans regarding the management of the response to Hurricane Katrina.

"While there was a clear lack of leadership in the response to the crisis in the Gulf Coast, it is very important to speak with those in charge to determine the mistakes and oversights which led to this situation. This is especially important in Rhode Island, where we have the Port of Providence and many other low lying areas which could be seriously damaged in the event of a major hurricane," Senator Chafee said.

Senator Chafee has been especially concerned about how DHS will improve the balance between responses to terrorist attacks and natural disasters. This nexus is critical to ensuring that the federal government is prepared to respond to all types of disaster situations, whether in the form of terrorism, weather-related emergencies, or a worldwide pandemic.

Consequently, Chafee questioned the Secretary about another emerging threat to the people of the United States, the Avian Flu pandemic, and the specific steps DHS is taking to prepare the American people in the event of such a disaster. Chertoff spoke of a national strategy and a corresponding implementation plan, early engagement on the

ground, as well as the widespread dissemination of information via the internet and other means, and an overall continuity of operations between federal and local officials.

“With the information provided in today’s hearing, I am hoping we can take a hard look Rhode Island’s infrastructure to determine potential weaknesses and ultimately put measures in place to ensure we are better prepared for a category four or five hurricane,” he continued.

Chafee has actively participated in this continuing investigation, as a member of both the Homeland Security Committee and the Committee on Environment and Public Works. Chafee has participated in several hearings on the issues including causation, current problems, rebuilding strategies, and future prevention. The Senator has visited the storm damaged regions of New Orleans, and has introduced a number of bills to facilitate hurricane relief efforts, addressing many of the needs in hurricane damaged regions, including levee and wetlands restoration, highway reconstruction, flexibility for federal building leases, and wastewater projects and testing.

Also, Chafee supported legislation which will help protect all of America’s communities from the destruction caused by severe weather and flooding, and enhancing natural means of protection by restoring our fragile ecosystems. He has been an advocate for measures to authorize critical flood control, storm damage reduction, and environmental restoration projects across the country. Protection of vital waterways and ports is a key component of the national transportation system and the economy.

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